



FACT SHEET FOR HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS

All Children 6 to 23 Months Old Should Get Flu Shot

CDC recommends that all children 6 months to 23 months old get a flu shot.

Children Less Than 2 More Likely to Be Hospitalized

Recent studies have shown that children less than 2 years old—even healthy children—are more likely than older children to end up in the hospital with serious complications if they get influenza. These complications can include pneumonia, dehydration, worsening of long-term medical problems like heart disease or asthma, encephalopathy, and other bacterial infections, including sinus and ear infections. In some cases, these complications can lead to death. Hospitalization rates in infants are comparable to hospitalization rates in the elderly.

To protect their health, all children 6 months to 23 months old should be vaccinated against the flu. (The flu shot is not approved for use in children less than 6 months old.)

The Studies

Two studies published in 2000 showed the same results: that otherwise healthy children under 2 years old were more likely to be hospitalized for serious influenza complications than older, healthy children. These studies were published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* and the *Journal of Pediatrics*.

Based on this information, the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP)—a group that advises CDC on vaccinations—first moved to “encourage” vaccination among this age group. In 2004, this advice was strengthened to a “recommendation,” which is the strongest endorsement for vaccination.

Influenza-Related Deaths in Children During the 2004–05 Influenza Season

During the 2004–05 influenza season, CDC received reports of 39 influenza-related deaths among children (people under 18 years old) from 17 states.

The severity of an influenza season varies year to year. On average, 178 influenza-related deaths occur among people under 18 years old every year. Over half of these deaths occur in children less than 5 years old.

Influenza-Related Deaths in Children Last During the 2003–04 Influenza Season

During the 2003–04 influenza season, CDC received reports of 152 influenza-related deaths among children (people under 18 years old) from 40 states.

- All of these children had influenza infection diagnosed by laboratory tests.
- Most of the children were less than 5 years old.
- Twenty-seven percent of the children had a condition that placed them at high risk for serious complications from influenza and were recommended for vaccination by ACIP. Thirty-one percent had some other underlying medical condition. Forty percent of the children were previously healthy.
- Of the 135 children who died that could have been vaccinated, only 5 were “adequately” vaccinated against influenza. Seventy-six children had not been vaccinated against influenza at all.

For more information, visit www.cdc.gov/flu,
or call CDC at 800-CDC-INFO (English and Spanish) or 888-232-6348 (TTY).

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